QUIET SITTING

The Daoist Approach for a Healthy Mind and Body

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With an Introduction by Yanling Johnson

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT JINGGONG (QUIET MEDITATION EXERCISE) THERAPY FOR STRESS-RELATED DISORDERS

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This article was written by Mr. Chen Yingning in August 1957 during his sojourn as a guest lecturer at the Screen Hill Sanatorium in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. After revisions by the author himself, the article was published in the No. 3 issue of the Journal of the Daoist Association, *1963.*

Introduction

All illnesses and diseases are treatable by medication, surgery, or physical therapy. Most are curable. The exceptions are cancer, mankind's bane for which there is no complete cure by Chinese or Western medicine, and stress-related disorders which, although less life-threatening than cancer, baffle the average physician. This is an ailment common to those engaged in mentally challenging jobs. Nerves constitute the essence of life. Applying medicine to fortify nerves that had already been weakened by stress is not likely to produce the desired effect. Only Jinggong in its purest form is the best remedy for frayed nerves, remedy that leads to healing without the intervention of medicine.

I consider myself fortunate in that what little service I have rendered to the newly-established Jinggong Therapy Department of the Screen Hill Sanatorium during my recent stay there was successful. Since I could not stay there for too long, I planned to produce a manuscript complete with theory and specific instructions for the benefit of my successors. However, given the pressure of time, which does not allow a leisurely systematic narration chapter after chapter, I settled for a question-and-answer format

in which I deal with the topics one by one as I go along. (The entries include conversations I have had with physicians and patients at the sanatorium.) This being a newly established discipline with no precedents or reference books to fall back on, nor anyone to consult with, since medical researchers do not engage in practice and those who do have no interest in seeking medical knowledge, everything I say is based on my experience for more than sixty years, not from teachers or colleagues (what I said about the dearth of reference books and people to consult with does not apply to post-1957 years). Twenty-seven questions and answers, plus an article presenting general theories on Jinggong and an article on treatment of involuntary nocturnal emission, should suffice to tackle with stress-related disorders.

This being no more than a first draft, I expect to have the inadequacies in understanding, methodology, and diction remedied in a second edition.

Chen Yingning

August 1957

Workers' Sanatorium, Screen Hill, Hangzhou

Questions and Answers about Jinggong

1. Question: Is Jinggong one and the same with Qigong?

Answer: The focus of Jinggong is on *jing* (quiet, calm), not on qi (vital energy), whereas the focus of Qigong is on qi. Qigong exercises involve motions. They are not stationary. There is a whole array of different Qigong exercises taught all over the world—exercises on deep-breathing, reverse breathing, breath counting, breath adjustment, breath retention, and qi movements. There are also breathing techniques of frontal elevation and rear descent, rear elevation and frontal descent, left-to-right rotations and middle-section direct penetration, etc. All of the above-mentioned exercises involve qi, whereas Jinggong is done in complete stillness, with natural breathing. No effort is made to force the direction of the qi of the body. Otherwise, the word *jing* (quiet, calm) would lose its meaning.

2. Question: What are the advantages and disadvantages of Jinggong as compared to Qigong?

Answer: If done properly, Qigong can cure all illnesses but if not, it will not only fail to cure, but also add new illnesses to your body. As for Jinggong, if done properly, of course it cures all diseases that resist medicine but even if it is not done properly, it still brings benefit to the body.

At least it will surely not bring on new illnesses even if it produces no effect. Therefore, Qigong has advantages and disadvantages but Jinggong has only advantages.

3. **Question:** What kinds of people can do Qigong?

Answer: If you are a flexible person smart enough to stop immediately whatever you think you are not doing right and even to shift to another mode to deal with the situation, you are the right person to do Qigong. But those without much good sense, those prone to stubbornly digging in their heels even if they are not doing it right, should not do Qigong because they will not know how to respond to unexpected changes in the body. They will only do harm to their own health.

4. **Question:** What kinds of people can do Jinggong?

Answer: Everyone, male or female, old or young, smart or not, can do it. Those who are impulsive and restless may not enjoy it, but if they are willing to do it, they should also be able to achieve good results, although, in their case, it may take longer for results to show than in the case of those of a quiet disposition.

5. **Question:** What kinds of illnesses respond well to Qigong treatment?

Answer: According to theories of Chinese medicine, the following kinds of patients respond well to medication as well as to Qigong: those susceptible to colds and coughs due to a deficiency of qi in the lungs; those with poor appetite and indigestion due to stomach qi deficiency, those whose three visceral cavities housing the internal organs are blocked due to retention of dampness or phlegm and are therefore vulnerable to all kinds of illnesses; those whose intestines absorb water poorly or whose with unformed stool due to deficiency of qi in the body cavity between the diaphragm and the umbilicus housing the spleen; those with excessive urine that is clear and cloudy by turns due to kidney qi deficiency; those lacking energy due to liver qi deficiency; and those with problems of metabolism, in the language of Western medicine.

6. Question: What are the illnesses that Jinggong works best on?

Answer: All illnesses that arise from a weakened constitution. Symptoms include: dizziness, lightheadedness, blurred vision, ringing in the ears, palpitation, panic attacks, insomnia, nightmares, restlessness, edginess, crankiness, dejection, overanxiety, moodiness, forgetfulness, weakness in the legs, loss of muscle, malnutrition due to insufficient food intake, indigestion due to overeating,

little tolerance for hard work, and lack of interest in life. Medication rarely relieves these symptoms and physical exams fail to pinpoint the problem. The only cure is in Jinggong. For quicker results, Jinggong can be combined with exercises such as taiji (taichi) or calisthenics.

7. Question: The ordinary Quiet Sitting Therapy is inseparable from Qigong. Why do you draw a distinction between Jinggong and Qigong?

Answer: Jinggong is focused on stillness and Qigong on motion. So they are different in nature. The ordinary Quiet Sitting Therapy is not in line with the principles of Jinggong. Those who practice the Quiet Sitting Therapy may be sitting immobile, but their minds are still alert. Despite its name, it's a therapy that involves motion and therefore does not qualify as real Jinggong.

8. Question: What qualifies as Jinggong?

Answer: Step 1: Keep your body still. Step 2: Keep your mind still. Step 3: Tune out all thoughts about your body. Forget that "I" exists.

9. Question: What is so good about reaching such a state?

Answer: The human body has the built-in strength to fight diseases, but a weakened constitution or other obstacles

block it. Jinggong's role is to help the body eliminate the obstacles and regain its own innate strength. Once the strength is brought out, healing will only be a matter of time.

10. **Question:** How does one go about the three steps?

Answer: Whether sitting or lying flat, you start by relaxing until there is no tense spot throughout your body and you feel completely at ease. If you do it right, you will not feel bored with the lapse of time, nor will you feel pain or numbness. This means that your body has achieved peace, but your mind may still be disturbed. So the next step is to banish all thoughts from your mind. Do not think of the past, the present, or the future. Let your mind enjoy complete rest. Now, even though your mind gains peace, you may still be conscious of yourself. So the next step is to enter a drowsy, dreamless state in which you are not aware of anything, not even of your own existence. If you have dreams, that means your mind is still at work. Your emotions—joy, anger, sadness, fear—and your thoughts about food, drink, and sex can be kept under control when you are sober but not when you are in dreamland. If you are in such a state, you are not completely free from self-consciousness.

11. **Question:** When sitting still, one's body may sud-

denly stir involuntarily, and the movements vary from person to person, even in the same person. These movements are quite outside of one's control. What are the reasons for such a strange phenomenon?

Answer: This is caused by the vital energy of the human body. If this is strange, what would you say about the numerous other strange things in the human body? There is the breathing of the lungs, the palpitations of the heart, the peristalsis of the stomach and the intestines, the digestion of food, the excretion of the glands, the metabolism of cells, the growth of hair and nails, the union of sperm and ovum, and the formation of a fetus. Which one of those is under the control of one's mind? If you are not surprised at all these mysterious, imperceptible workings inside the body, why should you be surprised at involuntary external movements?

12. **Question:** The workings inside the body have never been controllable since birth and it's the same for everybody. That's why we don't find them surprising. But external movements have always followed the directions of the mind. And if, all of a sudden, you start to have these involuntary movements, won't you worry that things will eventually get out of hand? How strange you would look if you are always shaking your

limbs and jerking your head! Are there ways to keep the movements under control?

Answer: As long as you do Jinggong right, breathe normally, and do not force your body movements the way you do calisthenics, no harm will be done. Any involuntary movements will stop by themselves with the passage of time. If you lose patience and want them to stop immediately, that can also be done. You just need to put a stop to Jinggong, let your mind wander, and even exercise a little control, and the movements will stop. But the principle of Jinggong is the absence of motion. Movements are the exceptions. Do not believe that movements are unavoidable for all those practicing Jinggong.

13. **Question:** Is it true that after the first time, such involuntary movements will become habitual every time you do Jinggong?

Answer: No. After all the qi in your body and your limbs can flow freely and unobstructed, no involuntary movements will occur during your Jinggong sessions. Even so, the qi under your navel may inevitably move around. You should know this, so that you won't panic when this happens. If you don't know how to respond, you will only make matters worse.

14. Question: How are such involuntary movements during a Jinggong session related to therapy?

Answer: Some illnesses are obvious to the patient and the physician, some are hidden. In fact, they can be so deeply hidden that no tests can pick them up. After you become quite accomplished in your Jinggong skills, the vital energy in your body will be unleashed, so that if an illness blocks its way, it will put up a fight, causing your limbs and joints to jerk involuntarily. After several sessions, some of the obstacles will be removed, but the remaining ones will make you involuntarily jerk in other ways. By the time all obstacles have been gradually gotten out of the way, you will have no involuntary movements in your Jinggong sessions.

15. Question: If these movements are soft and gentle, it's all right not to do anything about them but to let them subside on their own. However, if the movements are too violent, to the point where you flail your arms and legs around non-stop, what are you going to do?

Answer: This has to do with the patient's constitution. If Jinggong works well on you, that means your constitution is very likely a weak one, and therefore you are definitely not prone to violent movements. If you have a strong constitution and just happen to be slightly ill,

you can just take the right medication for it rather than practicing Jinggong. So you need not worry on that score. Now, if the involuntary movements are due to the fact that the patient's constitution is not one for Jinggong, and the Jinggong is not done in the right way, then the instructor should make adjustments and try to stop the movements before selecting other methods suitable for the patient. The idea is not to rush things.

16. Question: Will involuntary movements happen to everyone practicing Jinggong?

Answer: No. Most people engaged in Jinggong do not have such movements.

17. Question: Doesn't everybody practice the same Jinggong? Why are some people immune?

Answer: That's because everybody's constitution is different. That's why the same medication for the same illness can produce different results.

18. Question: Are involuntary movements good or bad according to the principles of Jinggong?

Answer: Many ancient books on cultivation of the body talk only about vibrations inside the body while sitting still. No mention is made of external involuntary move-

ments. Those practicing Jinggong in those times made it a rule that the body should not move. If limb movements occurred, the instructor would reproach the student for having committed a cardinal mistake and try to set him/her straight. However, of the many cases of involuntary movements I have witnessed over the last few decades, the results are mixed. It's hard to generalize. As I see it, the purpose of practicing Jinggong being to cure illnesses, if a patient regains health, we'll say the therapy worked; if not, we'll say it failed. If the movements make you feel good, we'll say Jinggong is effective on you; if not, we'll say it doesn't work for you. So do not pass judgments on the effectiveness of Jinggong just by the occurrence or absence of involuntary movements.

19. **Question:** I understand that there is supposed to be movements of qi in the abdomen in a properly done Jinggong session. Is it true that such qi movements occur only after the phase of external involuntary movements is over?

Answer: Not necessarily. (1) A small number of people engaged in Jinggong feel movements of qi in the abdomen toward the end of the phase of external movements. (2) Some people experience no abdominal movements even after the phase of external movements is over. For them, abdominal qi movements begin to occur only after

they go through a phase of complete stillness. (3) There are also people who skip the stage of involuntary movements. Their accomplishment is such that they feel warm qi surging in the abdomen. (4) A majority of people experience no unusual conditions in years of Jinggong practice, but their weak constitution gradually regains health without their realizing it. So, for those engaged in Jinggong, involuntary external or internal movements or the lack of them or their sequence can vary from person to person. There is no fixed pattern.

20. Question: When one becomes quite accomplished in Jinggong, what should be done if there is internal surging of qi but no external movements?

Answer: When this happens, just remain still and let the qi run its own course. You need only be slightly conscious of the qi. Do not, on any account, try to help it, direct it, or suppress it. Just slowly and gradually let it go away and stop on its own. After you regain your normal state, you can sit still for another 30 minutes before leaving your seat. When the moving qi has not yet come to a complete stop, do not abruptly end your Jinggong session, and allow yourself to be alarmed, disturbed, have troubled thoughts, or get angry. Otherwise, things may go wrong.

21. Question: Could you explain the therapeutic effect of Jinggong in the light of modern medical science?

Answer: Jinggong's origin predates the Qin Dynasty (221 – 206 BC). It sprang from Daoist roots, not from the medical profession. Moreover, physicians of the successive dynasties never used Jinggong to cure illnesses. Chao Yuanfang, celebrated physician of the Sui Dynasty (581 – 618), advocated in *The Origins of Diseases* various methods of guiding the qi to cure all kinds of illnesses, but these methods all involve willful movements and therefore do not qualify as Jinggong. So, no theoretical base is to be found in writings on traditional Chinese medicine, let alone Western medical literature. However, after Pavlov's theory became public knowledge, most of the reasons for Jinggong treatment became explainable. In short, the basic idea was to rid the higher nerve center of all impairments and restore its normal function. However, some exceptional phenomena in the entire process of Jinggong practice still defy explanation. Our job is to use our ancestors' methods to our advantage and help physicians of today treat stress-related disorders. The exceptional phenomena can be ignored for now and left for future studies.

22. Question: Does Jinggong, as you call it, go by other names in ancient books on self-cultivation?

Answer: It's called *zuo wang* (sit in oblivion) in Tang Dynasty (618 – 907) books and *zhi nian* (stop all thoughts) in Song Dynasty (960 – 1279) books. They are similar to what I call Jinggong in theory, but not in purpose. Our purpose is to cure illnesses; theirs is to cultivate body and mind. But in *Collections of All Books Past and Present*, there is a chapter devoted to Jinggong, in which the instructions are extremely complex. They are by no means for pure Jinggong, so students should avoid being confused by the identical name. (The chapter on Jinggong referred to above is in Volumes 293 – 302 in the part on the supernatural in the *Encyclopedia of Natural Sciences*.)

23. Question: In books of antiquity, what is the name for Qigong as we know it now?

Answer: What is now practiced widely today as Qigong is a combination of exhalation, inhalation, breath retention, breath adjustment, relaxation of mind, and guidance of qi, etc., as advocated by the sages. Exhalation and inhalation mean exhaling through the mouth the old and stagnant air in the lungs and inhaling clean air through the nose. Breath retention means holding the fresh air in the lungs for a while after inhaling. Breath adjustment means that breathing should proceed from harsh to gentle, from hard to soft, from quick to slow, and from shal-

low to deep, but this should happen naturally, in stages. Do not force things. Relaxation of mind means focusing the mind on one fixed spot in the body so as to banish all other thoughts from your mind. Guidance of qi means that when you are accomplished enough to feel warm qi moving in your lower abdomen, be sure to let your mind guide the qi throughout the body to drive away illnesses, if any, or simply, in the absence of illnesses, to build up your health. But this is different from what is practiced by kung fu masters and by those practicing the Daoist "cinnabar field" (lower abdomen) methods of breathing. So beginners must take care not to mix them up. There is a host of other techniques of directing the qi: the Five-fowl Method of Hua Tuo (physician, ? – 208), the Eight-section Qigong Exercises (Ba Duan Jin), the Twelve-section Qigong Exercises (Shi Er Duan Jin), the Daoist method for Muscle Change Classic, and the many other exercises described in *The Origins of Diseases* written by physicians of the Sui Dynasty. They are all methods to direct the qi. (Methods practiced by kung fu masters, Daoists, and Buddhists are now all lumped together under the term Qigong, making it sound extremely complicated.)

24. **Question:** Since there are so many kinds of Qigong, each must have its own advantages in treating illnesses.

By leaving aside Qigong and fo cusing on Jinggong only, aren't you being one-sided?

Answer: I do so after careful considerations. I have my reasons.

(1) With other ways of treating illnesses (like medicine, physical therapy), however complicated they may be, the patient leaves everything to the doctors and nurses, and doesn't get consumed with worry. But in the case of Qigong, patients have to do it themselves. No one can do it for them. Some patients do not want to take the trouble. Some are willing to do it, but few get the hang of it. One must pick the simplest and most effective method out of the multitudes of available methods to make it more easily acceptable to patients. That is why I chose the simplest way out and put my focus on Jinggong.

(2) With regard to movements of taiji or other similar exercises, not everybody can do them properly even when there are illustrations to consult and instructors' demonstrations to imitate. Since Qigong involves what happens inside the body, illustrations can't capture it and instructors can't demonstrate for you, so patients have to be responsible for themselves. Some people get the hang of it, and some don't. It is in order to be on the safe side that I chose to concentrate on Jinggong today rather than on Qigong.

(3) For better results, all treatments of illnesses must be supplemented by Jinggong and Qigong. In the case of

stomach ulcer, Qigong alone, without the involvement of Jinggong, can hardly do much good, but Jinggong alone, without Qigong, can heal ulcers. This has been borne out by my own experience more than once. In fact, those recent much-celebrated cases of successful Qigong therapies all contain some elements of Jinggong in them and, what's more, it's the Jinggong elements that played a major role. After regaining health, patients all attribute the success to Qigong, whereas, in fact, Jinggong was quietly doing its stuff, and Qigong only played a supplementary role. That is why I chose to concentrate on Jinggong.

(4) With conventional treatments, the physicians make all the decisions for the patients. It follows that the physicians are responsible for all successes or failures. But as far as Qigong is concerned, it's the patient who takes the initiative. The physician's role is limited to providing a few pointers. If the exercises are not done properly and result in health disturbances, thus diminishing the effectiveness of the therapy, the doctor and the patient will put the blame on each other. Who should be held accountable for the mistakes? Jinggong is easier for beginners than Qigong. Even if no quick fix can be managed, at least nothing can go wrong. After explaining Jinggong to in-patients, the instructor can let them practice on their own. It will be enough for the instructor to check the pa-

tients twice a day rather than keep them under constant observance. To train Jinggong students is obviously easier and simpler than to train Qigong students. That is also why I chose to concentrate on Jinggong.

(5) In this day and age, most chronic diseases can probably be attributed to weakened constitutions. If properly diagnosed, some can be treated with medicine prescribed to match the disorder. For example, weakened digestive functions can be treated with tonics for the stomach, weakened reproduction functions with hormone therapies, weakened hematogenic functions with blood tonics, weakened metabolic functions with tonics to nourish the qi. These are all effective treatments. However, there are no effective cures, in Chinese or Western medicine, for weakened constitutions caused by stress or other factors not listed above. The only treatment in such cases is for the patient to rest thoroughly in complete calmness for an extended period of time. Because no Qigong exercises fit this principle, I chose to focus on Jinggong.

(6) Peace is what's lacking in people's lives. In the twenty-four hour cycle, the limbs may have moments of rest, but the mind never enjoys peace. It works when you are awake and is disturbed by dreams when you are asleep, and you feel just as tired in your dreams as when awake. Years of mental exhaustion will result in nervous

breakdown. Healthy people who take time out from their busy schedule to do Jinggong twice a day will be able, if they keep at it, to prevent nervous breakdowns and prolong life. That is another reason why I chose to concentrate on Jinggong.

(7) As for what kinds of Qigong are advisable for what illnesses and what kinds of illnesses should not be treated by Qigong, there are no simple answers. Decisions must be made in the light of theory as well as clinical experience. An instructor's job is by no means easy. Even if the instructor is not at fault, the patient may do it wrong and go overboard, which is why Qigong-induced health disturbances are only to be expected. Jinggong, on the other hand, is applicable to everyone and every kind of illness. You need not worry about matching the exercise to the illness. Instructors can not go wrong, and students can't overdo it. One almost never hears about cases of Jinggong practices going awry. Another reason why I opted for Jinggong.

(8) My focus on Jinggong doesn't mean a blanket condemnation of all kinds of Qigong. If the instructor is knowledgeable in the advantages and disadvantages of various kinds of Qigong and gains a clear idea of the patient's constitution and character, he may choose one particular kind of Qigong for the patient on an ad-hoc

basis. This will work better on patients with complicated stress-related disorders, with Jinggong playing a major role and Qigong a supplementary one.

25. **Question:** What are the qualifications for an instructor?

Answer: In the old days, there was nothing challenging about the instructor's job. Having the students memorize a rhymed formula was all it took. It was up to the students themselves to try to get the hang of it through practice. The instructor was not accountable for success or failure, and the students had no expectations of an immediate cure because their hopes lay elsewhere. They did not expect to be cured in the first place, and not every student was sick. But nowadays, since all those checked into a sanatorium expect to be cured, the instructor doubles as a physician, and this makes the job much more demanding. So the qualifications of an instructor include: (1) Medical knowledge. (2) Clinical experience. (3) A gentle disposition and therefore not likely to find patients a nuisance. (4) A willingness to listen and not to hold on to preconceived ideas. (5) The ability to prevent errors on the part of the patients and to correct them if this happens. (6) The ability to tell if some irregularities experienced by a patient mean trouble or not and to teach the patient to deal with them. Inner exercises (including Buddhist and

Daoist Jinggong and all varieties of Qigong) used to circulate among a small minority of people. They have never been, as they are now, taken up by sanatoriums all over the country as a therapy. This is a new undertaking. Today's instructors can hardly stand a chance if they have no knowledge of the old ways, but if they only know the old ways and lack other branches of knowledge, they also fall short of the requirements for the job in this day and age. A qualified instructor is one who meets the above-cited requirements and never stops learning to master all methods, achieve a thorough understanding, accumulate experience, and apply his expertise with flexibility.

26. Question: What should one watch out for before starting Jinggong sessions?

Answer: In order to achieve quick results, directors of sanatoriums and patients themselves should watch out for the following ten things:

(1) The noise level of the surrounding environment. Those practicing Jinggong must first pick the right location. The most ideal location is a spot on a wooded hill or by a body of water. The next best is a quiet place in an open countryside. Markets, alleys, and all other places with high noise levels won't do. Human voice, the rumbling of wheels, the throbbing of engines, music, singing, babies' cries—these

should all be avoided to give your ears some peace and quiet rather than irritate your audio nerves.

(2) The quality of the air. The air around you should be very fresh and clean, without dust, exhaust from cars, and all kinds of foul smell, like those from gasoline, kitchen odors, paint, mosquito-repellent incense, disinfectants, etc. They all do harm. Indoor furniture should be kept only at a minimum. Too many objects are also likely to emit unpleasant odor. The air in a place with lush green plants is beneficial to health, and gives your nose some peace and quiet so that your olfactory nerves will not be irritated.

(3) The lighting. With regard to indoor lighting, seekers of health in ancient times emphasized the balance of yin and yang so that one would not overwhelm the other. So it is advisable not to be too bright or too dark. Since our purpose is to heal, we need to make sure that our nerves are absolutely at peace without any irritation. Excessive light is worse than darkness. So it would be best to have light blue or light green wall paint and curtains. Avoid bright red or white. Electric lighting should not be glaring. Rid the room of eyesores, and also make sure that nothing outside the window offends the eye. This is to give peace to your eyes so that nothing irritates your visual nerves.

(4) Food seasoning. Food should not be overly pun-

gent, sweet, sour, salty, or spicy hot. The more bland the better. Do more boiling and steaming than braising in soy sauce and frying. What pleases your taste buds too much may not be good for you. Also, give up smoking and drinking alcohol. This is to give peace to your tongue so that your sense of taste will not be irritated.

(5) The climate. Temperature has a great impact on Jinggong practice. Good weather will help you make progress with your exercises. Bad weather will be a hindrance. When it is so hot that you sweat even though you are wearing only one layer of clothing, when it is so cold that you don't feel warm even though you have a cotton-padded coat on, and when humidity is too high, your exercises will hardly be effective. If a rainstorm comes on with claps of thunder and flashes of lightning, you must stop your Jinggong session. If it warms up when you are in the middle of a session, do not turn on the electric fan. If it gets cold, do not light a fire (central heating is OK). Some people say that a chimney is not harmful. This doesn't make sense from a scientific perspective. Granted that the advantage of a chimney is to release the carbon dioxide from the fuel, but it also has a disadvantage: It consumes oxygen contained in the air in the room. A low oxygen level is injurious to even a healthy person, let alone a sick one. If it is necessary to use a chimney, see to it that the

doors and windows are not tightly closed. You must let in some air from outside. Make sure that while there is circulation of air in the room, the patient should be kept from whiffs of cold air, to avoid catching cold. In general, good weather lasts less than six months out of a year. If it's nice today, it may change for the worse tomorrow. Jinggong devotees are advised to seize the moment when the climate is right.

(6) Food nutrition. Foods high in protein do nourish the body but they need to be digested well. Otherwise, excessive intake of such foods is harmful. People with frayed nerves usually also have digestion problems. So, high-protein foods should be taken in moderation. That applies also to dietary supplements. Junk foods must be banned. Do not satisfy your cravings at the expense of your health.

(7) Suspension of all ties with the outside world. Of course you are expected to put your job on hold for the entire duration of your stay in the sanatorium for Jinggong therapy, but your private matters and everything involving your family must also be planned out in advance to spare you worries. Once you have checked into the sanatorium, keep visits from relatives and friends at a minimum; reduce all exposure to the outside world by limiting your phone calls, newspaper reading, and letter writing. You will then be able to stay calm and find it

easier to learn Jinggong and speed up the healing process.

(8) Keep your mind unoccupied. I advise against reading books that require mental application, especially science literature with complex math formulas and numbers. If you enjoy reading for amusement, it's all right to leaf through magazines and travel books. During Jinggong sessions, focus your mind on listening to your breathing. When taking a walk, focus your mind on the flowers, grass, trees, hills, and waters. During a meal, focus your mind on the presentation, smell, and taste of the food (sanatoriums should take seriously the presentation, smell, and taste of the food they serve). When doing calisthenics or taiji, focus your mind on your limb movements.

(9) The timing of exercise. Jinggong can be done at all times of the day, although morning is best. A sitting session should last at least 30 minutes but less than 90 minutes. A lie-in-bed session has no limits of time. You can lie for as long as you want. It would be best if you can sleep throughout the night without waking up even once. If you wake up in the night and toss and turn, wide awake, you may get up and do a sitting session until you get so sleepy that you have to lie down again. This is a sure-fire way to drop off to sound sleep. However, do not start a sitting session or go to sleep right after a big meal, before digestion sets in. You need to exercise a little first.

(10) The posture. The principle of Jinggong being thorough mental physical rest, posture is not important. You can sit with your legs crossed or dangling, lie on your back or on your side, with both eyes fully or partially closed, hands crossed or apart, palms up or down. But it's stricter with the sitting posture. You must sit with your back straight. Do not slouch, but do not force it. There must be nothing around you that you can lean against. When lying down, your head should be higher than your feet in a progressively downward slant. Do not use a high pillow because that will only raise your head but cannot ensure a gradually reclining slant. It's preferable to use a hard bed. Slip something under the feet of the headboard of the bed and raise them by seven or eight inches. Leave the two feet at the other end untouched, so that the bed becomes tilted. But this method should not be applied to those suffering from cerebral anemia. Whether seated or in a supine position, the body must be totally relaxed. All restraining objects such as shoes and belts must be taken off, so that there is no restriction anywhere. This is the only way to ensure complete tranquility. In addition, all mosquitoes, bedbugs, and fleas must be exterminated. Even one or two of such pests can ruin your Jinggong session. All other details that I have not touched upon can be taken care of according to the general rules of the sanatoriums.

27. **Question:** Is it better to practice Jinggong in a group in a large room or by oneself in a small room?

Answer: There are pros and cons with both. It's hard to say which one is better. In a group setting, mutual observance may give inspiration but it may also give rise to self-consciousness. Doing it by oneself at one's own free will may make one feel isolated and become lazy. Buddhists who practice in shrine halls together follow the group method. Those who practice in thatched huts in remote mountains follow the individual method. Although their practice has purposes different from ours, their methods are of value to us. Modern sanatoriums preferably should provide both kinds of accommodations to patients, so that they can make their choices as needed.

A General Introduction to Jinggong

The above twenty-seven questions and answers covered matters relating to Jinggong from all possible angles, but there were not enough detailed instructions on the exercise itself. So here is some more information:

There is currently no effective medicine for stress-related disorders. Phosphoric supplements' claim to fortifying the brain is unsubstantiated. All other stimulants or sedatives

have only temporary effect. After the effect wears out, the symptoms come back, maybe with a vengeance.

One must ensure complete tranquility of the mind and disperse all random thoughts from it. This is the most important principle of Jinggong practice and is the most effective treatment for stress-related disorders. However, it is difficult to put a stop to all the thoughts that go habitually through your mind. Our forefathers devised a host of methods to attain this purpose, among which the best one is Zhuangzi's "listen-to-breathing" method (Zhuangzi, c. 369 – 286 BC).

You begin this exercise by using only your ears, not your mind. The idea is not to replace one thought with another, but more to force yourself to stay vigilant about your nose or your lungs. Nor is it to listen to any nasal sound. As long as you are aware of the exhalations and the inhalations, you are doing it right. Do not try to control the speed and depth of the breathing. Just let them be. By and by, your breath will be at one with your qi. All distracting thoughts will vanish. You will even forget about your breathing and gradually drift off to sleep. This is the most opportune moment to restore vigor to your frayed nerves. Seize the moment and abandon yourself to deep sleep. Be sure not to resist the temptation to sleep. After you wake up, repeat the exercise all over again, and you will be able to drop off to blissful sleep again. If you have already slept several times during the day and do not

wish to sleep any more, you may get up and do some light exercise in a woody place outside where the air is fresh and clean. You may stand there for a few minutes doing breathing exercises, or practice calisthenics or taichi. But do not go overboard. Do not tire yourself out. Once you return indoors, you may either sit or lie in bed, resume your "listening-to-breathing" exercise and, perhaps, to fall asleep again.

Most people with stress-related disorders are also plagued by insomnia. It is not advisable to take sleep pills on a regular basis. Only the "listening-to-breathing" method can tackle the problem at the root, without leaving any side effect. It is in keeping with the theory about yang entering yin in the *Classic of Internal Medicine* (*Huang Di Nei Jing*, China's earliest work on medicine completed between 770 BC – 25 AD).

Ancient books on medicine often make reference to the interdependence of the mind and the breath, but no specific instructions can be found. Su Dongpo's way is to count your breathings and then let the mind follow the breath (Su Dongpo, 1037 – 1101, a famous Chinese poet). Zhu Xi's way, as explained in his *Advice on Breath Adjustment*, is to "watch the tip of your nose," according to *The Surangama Sutra* (Zhu Xi, 1130 – 1200, Confucian scholar and founder of the school of Neo-Confucianism). However, since you have to count, you are not free from all engagement of the mind. And, in the latter case, since you have to watch your nose, your eyes

will get tired over time. Zhuangzi's "listening-to-breathing" method is the only one that calls for absolutely no engagement of the mind and leads to no fatigue. What follows is a list of the three methods for you to practice.

1. Su Dongpo's Theory on Health (*Dongpo Zhilin, Su Shi's Record in His Daily Life,* Vol.1)

Health conscious people must exercise moderation in their eating habits. Only when plagued with hunger can you start eating and you should stop before the feeling of fullness sets in. After each meal, take a stroll outdoors until the food has been digested. Then return indoors for exercises. You can freely decide whether to do the exercises in daytime or at night, seated or lying down. The only important thing is to keep your body from moving and stay immobile like a wooden statue. Then, in a combination of Buddhist and Daoist methods, gaze at the tip of your own nose while counting the number of exhalations and inhalations through your nose. The key is to empty your mind and not to force anything. When counting, count either all the exhalations or all the inhalations, not both. So each act of breathing, exhaling and inhaling, counts as one, not two. After you've counted hundreds of times, your mind will be a blank and your body motionless as a rock. Since you need not force anything on your mind and body, both will naturally enjoy tranquility.

After you've counted thousands of times, or if you have no more strength to go on counting, you can switch to another method, called "follow the breath." When you exhale, let your mind follow the air out of the body. When you inhale, let your mind follow the air on its way in, not through the nostrils, but filling every pore like evaporation of cloud and fog. When you attain this level of accomplishment, all long-standing ailments and afflictions will gradually go away and you reach enlightenment, just like a blind man suddenly regaining sight. Able to see his way ahead now, he no longer needs guidance.

2. Zhu Xi's Breath-Adjustment Method (*The Complete Works of Zhu Xi,* Vol. 85)

Watching the tip of one's own nose is the 14th of the 25 methods listed in *The Surangama Sutra*. Both Su Dongpo and Zhu Xi adopted the phrase, but each in a slightly different sense. In Zhu Xi's words, this is a method applicable anywhere and at any time, provided you are relaxed and feel comfortable. Do not make yourself uncomfortable in any way. Stay calm and let things take their own course. Do not force anything. When tranquility reaches its height, the pendulum will naturally swing toward motion, like fish rising to the surface of the water in spring to breathe. When motion reaches its height, the pendulum swings naturally toward tranquility,

like insects hibernating in winter to conserve energy. At this point, the qi in the body converges with the qi of heaven and earth, and the alterations of tranquility and motion unite with the movements of the universe. Words are inadequate to describe the wonders of this method. You may ask, who is behind all this? In fact, there is no one behind any of this. Everything is just a part of nature.

3. The Mind Tranquility Method of Zhuangzi
(Chapter IV, The Book of Zhuangzi)

Yan Hui asked Confucius, his teacher, about Zhuangzi's Mind Tranquility method, and this was Confucius' reply: Do not indulge in wild fancies. Gather all your thoughts together and then listen, not with your ears but with your mind. Then, listen not with your mind but with your qi. By this time, you should no longer be relying on your ears. Your mind and qi being at one, you should not be relying on your mind, either. Qi is something unsubstantial. It needs something to form a union with it. Only Dao can merge with the qi of the Great Void. If your mind attains the tranquility of the Great Void, you have made a success of the Mind Tranquility method.

There should be no division of stages to this method, but for the convenience of beginners, I'm going to divide the whole process into several steps and give some detailed instructions:

Step 1: "Gather all your thoughts together." Before you

begin the exercise, be sure to gather all your thoughts together and concentrate on the exercise. If any distracting thoughts remain, you will not be able to do a good job of it.

Step 2: "Listen not with your ears but with your mind." Once you have completed Step 1, you are ready to begin to "listen," but definitely not to listen with your ears to conventional sounds. You may get skeptical and ask, since it involves listening, what am I supposed to listen to, if not to sounds? No clear answer to this question can be found in the annotations to all kinds of theories. So let me make this clear: You begin by listening for the sound of breathing through your nostrils. The breathing of those with normal, unimpeded respiratory systems should be noiseless, which is why you are not supposed to listen with your ears. Even though there is no sound, you are aware of the speed and the strength of exhalations and inhalations through the nostrils, as are even the hearing-impaired. That's why the instructions are to "listen with your mind."

Step 3: As for "listen not with your mind but with your qi," this can again be problematic. You may be able to get away with saying "listen with your mind" because the mind, after all, is sentient, but qi is not. How can you listen with qi? If the mind listens to qi, what does qi listen to? So how should this be explained? My answer is: when you have become quite accomplished in Jinggong, your mind and your qi will be at one and inseparable. Qi becomes something im-

possible for the mind to listen to, hence the phrase "You must not listen with your mind." At this point, your mind and your qi, though at one, may not have reached the state of the Void and therefore may still have a slight awareness of your breathing. If you keep on, you will soon lose all awareness of your breathing. During the brief period of transition, rather than listen to qi with your mind and set mind and qi against each other, it makes more sense to listen to qi with qi and wipe out any rift between the two. That's why the instructions say "listen with qi."

Step 4: As for "You should no longer be relying on your ears," and "You should not be relying on your mind, either," a beginner should first try to gather his thoughts together before concentrating on "listening," but carrying this on for too long would be overdoing it. So go on to the next step. Stop listening. By this time, you are moving into the stage of the Void, where your mind and qi are at one, you are no longer aware of your breathing. You may appear to be asleep on the outside, but on the inside, it's another story.

Setp 5: As for "Qi is something unsubstantial. It needs something to form a union with it. Only Dao can merge with the qi of the Great Void. If your mind attains the tranquility of the Great Void, you have made a success of the Mind Tranquility method," after you have gone from the simpler to the more sophisticated stages, you naturally reach the state

of the Void without having to direct your mind to it. If you will it, you won't be able to get there. The entire process is to go from what you have acquired to what you were given by nature. So the fifth step should be experienced in the state you were born, but I will not get into that, because it exceeds the limits of therapy. For our purposes, it suffices to reach the state where your mind and your qi merge.

A summary of the three methods cited above: Su Dongpo's method is to begin by counting your breathing, then stop counting and let it be. Zhu Xi's method is to begin by watching your nose, then stop watching it and let everything take its own course. Zhuangzi's method is to begin by listening to your breath, then stop listening and let everything take its own course. The three methods begin differently but end on the same path. Learners can feel free to apply them in combination.

Young patients with stress-related disorders can be 70% or 80% cured by practicing these exercises for three months. Middle-aged patients can be 50% to 60% cured after three months' practice. However, symptoms can vary in degree. I was referring to more severe cases. Those with less severe symptoms can achieve full recovery. After you leave the sanatorium and return to your workplace, it would be advisable to practice twice a day, once in the morning and once at night, and make it a habit. Only then will you be able to keep what you have gained and be fully accomplished in this healing art.